Podcast for Teachers: Sharing the Listening Path with Students

Listening is a crucial skill for students to develop for school and life success, yet we rarely purposefully approach a plan for students to learn the skills. Christine Miles, the creator of **The Listening Path** highlights the why and how for teachers to provide students the tools and practice to develop their listening capabilities. Consider the impact of a listening culture on classroom dynamics and student engagement.

Visit The Listening Path website here.

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Podcast Transcript:

[00:00:00.210] – Steve [Intro]

Hello, and welcome to the Teacher Edition of Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud. Teaching is a complex and rewarding journey, and I'm always eager to explore the many ways teachers engage students in their learning. This podcast is dedicated to supporting you, the teacher, as you inspire and guide your students. Thanks for joining me. I'm excited you're here.

[00:00:31.000] – Steve

Sharing the Listening Path with Students. I'm excited to welcome Christine Miles, the author and designer of, "The Listening Pathway" to our podcast. Christine works with educators, parents, and students to develop listening to understand. I'm anxious to learn more about her work, knowing the power of listening, both in students' school academic success as well as their social emotional life success. Welcome, Christine.

[00:01:03.050] – Christine

Hi. It's nice to be here, Steve. Thank you.

[00:01:06.030] – Steve

I'm looking forward to learn more about listening, as it's always been a key element in my work. Would you talk a little bit about why teaching students to listen is often overlooked, even though we know it's an important skill for them to have?

[00:01:24.600] – Christine

Yeah, it's mind boggling to me just how long this has been going on. I found an article in HBR from 1957, Ralph Nichols said, "we're not teaching students to listen. We're just giving them all these reprimands. Listen, pay attention…" It's no different than so many decades later. Even beyond that, we can go back to ancient Roman times, and rhetoric and oratory skills were the focus. The researchers call listening the Cinderella of language skills. They're overlooked compared to

the more prominent Step sisters. And it’s really true because everywhere I go, internationally or nationally, I say, do you have formal education in your schools? And the answer is no. It’s just mind boggling. And I deal with a lot of adults, and so I know how frustrated they are because they haven’t learned to listen and learning this skill later in life is possible and very doable, but it is easier to learn when younger. Do you want to ski when you’re 45 or five? Get on the slope. You’ll be fearless down the mountain. That’s part of why I’ve been determined to bring this to younger ages, because it’s time we teach them to ski at five.

[00:02:44.100] – Steve

I find it intriguing because if you unpack state standards in schools, they have listening listed in the English language arts curriculum. It’ll always say reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

[00:03:02.510] – Christine

Interesting.

[00:03:03.370] – Steve

But I don’t think I’ve observed a listening lesson all the time that I’ve been in teachers’ classrooms.

[00:03:10.540] – Christine

And I’ll tell you, the same is true in negotiations. Let me just make that comparison. So we did a workshop for a large pharmaceutical company, and they did 24 hours of negotiation skills, and then they brought in us. And I went, how do you negotiate without this is this skill that is critical. That’s the problem, right? Sales training tells you to listen maybe 30 minutes on how to do it, maybe. So it’s a common conundrum. And this is my conclusion – how do you teach something you’ve never been taught? So the psychologists of the world who are probably the most likely to have been taught is a small

percentage of people, and they are focused on helping individuals, not helping the masses of people learn a skill that they had some time on task when they were in their programs. So to me, we've been solving the symptom and not addressing the real problem.

[00:04:12.640] – Steve

What are some of the challenges that the teachers face when they're trying to foster what we might call deeper listening with their students?

[00:04:24.980] – Christine

Well, it's complicated. The way listening has been taught, shown, it's complicated. Active listening, even though, as I mentioned and said before, that it's like the Kleenex of the brand of listening and I'm a fan – is all about what to do, show your listening, instead of really get you to listen in a different way. So you have to white-knuckle it because our brains are the greatest enemy of listening. Our subconscious brain is like a mischievous child telling us to do everything but. We're telling ourselves stories. We're rehearsing what we say. We're distracted in so many ways, and not just by technology, but by what's going on in our subconscious. So it's a pretty big enemy to overcome. And without a common language or toolset, the teachers are trying to create an environment, but it's not universally understood.

[00:05:16.450] – Steve

I want to put something out to you that is totally just running through my mind now, and I may be totally off, so feel free to adjust it. But there's a phrase that I use in my work called, "student learning production behaviors." And it's a phrase I used to define what it is that the student does that causes the learning to happen. So I'm real big on the statement, "teachers don't cause student achievement, students cause student achievement." I can't teach you how to play an

instrument. I can't teach you a sport. I can teach you how to learn it, but you have to engage in learning behaviors. So very often, when I'm asking teachers is to try and identify in this lesson today, what are the learning production behaviors? One of the things I posed to the teacher is if I had a magic finger and I could put it on a kid's head in the middle of the lesson, what is it that you want going on inside that head? Whatever you want going on inside that head, that's probably what the learning production behavior is.

[00:06:24.600] – Christine

Interesting.

[00:06:25.530] – Steve

Is there a way that you can describe what it is? What is it that is going on in the student's head when the student is listening?

[00:06:35.270] – Christine

The language and the tools. Rather than it just being this esoteric thing that we want them to do, let's make it tangible, practical, and applicable. So I want them to have the ABCs. That's what I want them to think of. The ABCs of listening are, in the young kids' case, are the five tools to listen to understand so that they're not guessing, they're not just grabbing things out of air. When they use those tools and know that language, then the whole class can talk in a familiar way about listening. I'll give you an example. We want kids to listen for social emotional learning, but we also want them to listen for classroom management and for learning acquisition. This is what I've heard, you validate or invalidate this, that a teacher asks a question, the kids raise their hand and let's just say Sally starts to answer, and then Johnny can't wait to say what his answer is rather than making sure we heard the first answer and understand it. I call that meetings. We all just say what we feel next

instead of actually listening to what is actually said. We have something called the flash light where you have to shine a light on what the person said.

[00:07:47.190] – Christine

Here's where the teacher could say, "Johnny, before you give us your answer, shine a light on what Sally said." There's an anchoring around what that means, and those tools become the toolset for classroom, for learning environment, for understanding each other, and then for creating a greater level of acquisition because we're not just responding.

[00:08:09.860] – Steve

So practicing that builds that skill to the likelihood that can begin to happen unconsciously.

[00:08:18.130] – Christine

That's right. It becomes a habit.

[00:08:20.380] – Steve

If you're speaking, I know that I need to be listening to understand what you're saying.

[00:08:26.190] – Christine

Yeah. If I said to you Steve, you have to repeat what I say or tell me what I said before you respond, and I practice that, you would just automatically start to do it. Now, imagine you take that home. Oh, honey, you said you had a bad day. You're not feeling great. You're not sure you feel up to making dinner? Okay, now you're in a different conversation. What's for dinner? It becomes a muscle. But if we don't have the language and we just say, you should be able to tell people what they said, and we don't practice that. And it's just you have to make it fun, too. We have to take kids' imagination into this experience and adults and help them understand where they are in this journey of listening, which is a process of

discovery. It’s about discovering and finding things. The little highlight books that I used to do at the dentist office, “Where’s The Lion?” So we’re looking for things. It’s just that then it becomes really interesting when I’m not just there for you, but I’m there to discover something and find something really cool.

[00:09:31.510] – Steve

I know that you’ve prepared this for teachers to work with students on the listening path. So can you walk us down the listening path and some of the components?

[00:09:43.900] – Christine

Sure. So what’s the path to understanding? I believe listening is more than paying attention, which is what we largely focus on, particularly with young kids, listen to pay attention. That’s important, but it’s a little bit of a low bar, in my opinion. First step, right? So the path to understanding means you wouldn’t go hiking in the woods unprepared, and we are in conversations or the conversational woods all the time unprepared. So what are the tools you need in your backpack to navigate the trail, the path? For the children, there’s five tools. We have a program that’s animated, but we also provide a physical toolkit for the classroom so that, again, the ABCs are all around and you’re anchoring it into that. The five tools are a map because when you’re in the woods, you need to know where you are and where you’re going. When we listen, and on that map, there’s facts and feelings. We tend to listen for facts and not feelings, but we need to get both. So the map is the first tool. The second tool is what we call the four stops. So there’s trail markers. And when you’re listening, you’re always listening to a story.

[00:10:53.420] – Christine

We teach kids this and parents. And so when you get that story, there’s four stops. So just like you would in the

woods, there's lots of side trails. So you got to stay on that main path. And those four stops keep you on the main path to the story. And then there's a compass, which is how do you guide the speaker to tell the story. People aren't great storytellers, so we have to take charge and help them stay on the main path. There's five questions that we teach the kids that are the foundational questions to help do that. Then, as I mentioned, we talk about the flashlight. When we're listening, teacher to student, student to teacher, parent to student or child, where the speaker is in the dark about what the listener heard. Just like it's late in the woods, you can't see, the speaker can't see what you heard. We have to shine a light on that. We have to practice telling them the story they told us. Not just little pieces of it, the whole story. That's a muscle. And that flashlight is part of what we teach. And then we also provide a water filter because our thoughts and feelings, our brains pollute the story that people tell us, and we have to filter out all that pollution to make sure we're clear and that the speaker feels safe.

[00:12:12.620] – Christine

There's a phrase that is that water filter phrase. It's called, "do I get you?" I actually learned this from Mike Bosworth, who wrote a very famous sales methodology in the '70s called Solution Selling. When you say, "do I get you?" you're asking if you get the person and the situation. It's part of how we make sure we filter it out. We teach kids how to listen with their eyes, their ears, and their heart to make sure they're watching for the response from the speaker. When you use all those tools, it will lead you to the meaning. You don't have to search for it. It finds you. So it's a process of discovery.

[00:12:53.580] – Steve

So the scary part for teachers listening to what you just said is, how much time does that take?

[00:13:00.600] – Christine

Yeah. I appreciate that you bring that up. I've been an educator, even though I've been in business, I've been an educator. I have a master's in education psychology, and I've been an educator my entire life. I started developing trainings at 26 for people. But I also knew I needed to surround myself with teachers to do this. So I brought them in to help make sure that it would meet the teachers in school's needs. So the lessons are 20 to 30 minutes. There's 11 of them. And I'm the teacher. Christine is animated. So I teach the tools, and then we provide the teachers the toolkit so that they can just use the tools in the class. It's plug and play, no professional development needed. It's really very seamless. All the materials are provided. Then we also send something home to the parents. We give the teacher something to send home to the parents or caregivers on every lesson, frankly, so that we can help parents and teachers communicate and listen well to each other as well, because we know that's a hard part of the job for teachers, because parents care about what's happening in schools.

[00:14:06.110] – Christine

They might have sometimes a feeling like their kid is the most important thing, and they are, but they're in with other children. So how do we create a balance and help that as well, as well as help the student learn?

[00:14:18.860] – Steve

So part of my coaching, I'm frequently getting people to look at the cost-benefit, I call it a balance scale. And so it seems to me whatever cost of time to work on this with kids is more than returned in the benefit. Could you talk a little bit about how student listening might impact classroom dynamics and student engagement?

[00:14:52.990] – Christine

It’s like any group behavior, and this is the psychology of it, is that if we create a common language, it’s easy. It’s a culture of listening. It’s not just an expectation, it becomes a common language. When you create that culture of understanding, that changes how we show up because we’re raising expectations to a different level. We all know that the technology in the digital world is making that harder and harder. It’s really important. We can’t get rid of technology totally, whatever you think about, whether it’s in schools or not. But we need to flex the other muscle. So part of this is like, this is the muscle we need to build so that we can still have good relationships, even with all the stuff that we’re dealing with in terms of all the technology. So it’s a very dynamic process. It’s really hard to be mean to kids and each other, adults or kids, when you understand each other on a different level. It just changes how you empathize.

[00:16:02.130] – Steve

It’s jumping out at me that a classroom culture of listening has just far-reaching benefits. It’s so many different levels.

[00:16:16.050] – Christine

It’s too much to expect teachers to create that on their own. That’s why we created the toolkit so that we can just… It’s like the math poster. You just got to give it to them. They know what to do. I know this. They know what to do as long as they have the toolkit and the language themselves. So it has to be simple. It has to be fun. The kids get a passport every time they go on a listening adventure. They get a sticker in their passport, they get reinforcements. It’s supposed to be fun. It’s the process of discovery. So it’s playful, it’s fun. We celebrate success. It’s silly sometimes, but it has academic impact as well as social emotional impact. I found out later in life that I have a form of dyslexia, so I barely got into college. I sold my way into Penn. I literally

convinced the guy. He said, you won't make it. And I thought, no wonder he believes that. I did great in college based on my grades, but my GREs were deplorable. He's like, you won't make it here. And I wrote a letter and said, I believe I can do it.

[00:17:25.730] – Christine

He felt sorry for me, let me in, and I did okay. But Listening is how I learned and overcame those challenges. If I hadn't listened, I wouldn't have made it through school. 85% of what we know is through listening.

[00:17:41.740] – Steve

Is there a way that folks can check in with you? Maybe can we get a look at some of the elements of the listening pathway and the way it works in a classroom?

[00:17:51.580] – Christine

Just to clarify, it's the listening path, just so people don't look for a pathway. They can go to thelisteningpath.com, and there's a demo. So any parents or the teachers can check that out, by the way. And it shows the entire first lesson. So this is 11 lessons that can be spread out through 11 weeks or the entire school year. We have a pacing guide for the teachers, but it's also designed to go at their own pace. The lessons are very layered, so it's also something that can be repeated throughout the year to reinforce.

[00:18:26.050] – Steve

Well, I'll encourage listeners to go take a look at that.

[00:18:30.030] – Christine

Thank you.

[00:18:30.380] – Steve

Thank you so much for joining us. And if you don't mind, I'm going to be following you and looking at arranging another

time for you to come back and have another conversation with you.

[00:18:43.140] – Christine

Well, I'd love to. And I'm a fan now, too, Steve, so I appreciate that.

[00:18:48.120] – Steve

All right. You have a great day.

[00:18:50.780] – Christine

Thank you so much.

[00:18:54.340] – Steve [Outro]

Thanks for listening, folks. I'd love to hear what you're pondering. You can find me on Twitter or LinkedIn at Barkley, or send me your questions and find my videos and blogs at barklypd. Com.